

Interviewer's Introduction

This series of four annual interviews presents the changing viewpoints of an incumbent District Engineer. The conversations cover a wide range of subjects, from the civil works planning process to personnel management. Yet they have a coherence, because all of these matters are pertinent to the management of an Engineer District.

The interviews did not begin with the intention of providing a record of a District Engineer's tenure. Before Colonel William W. Badger went to St. Paul as District Engineer in June 1979, he served the Chief of Engineers as special assistant for international programs. He was the first to hold this position. During his tenure as special assistant, he oversaw and helped develop a growing overseas program financed by recipient countries. When he went to St. Paul, he agreed to my suggestion that he record his views on his tour of duty as special assistant.

We conducted the first interview at his office in the Customs House about 60 days after he became St. Paul District Engineer. Most of the morning's discussion concerned international programs. We also touched briefly on the transition from staff officer to District commander.

Afterward, when we talked at more length about the change he had made, it became evident that he had already given considerable thought to his new assignment and to the nature of the District organization and operation. Based on this conversation, I suggested that we meet yearly to record his views of his responsibilities, goals, and problems as District Engineer. He agreed to do so and the series began.

Initially, the Historical Division did not intend to publish the interviews. Instead, the office considered the transcripts as source material for later writing projects. As time passed, it began to seem that the interviews might be more immediately useful. The District Engineer holds a key position in the Corps of Engineers, but there is little to which future district engineers can turn for insight into the methods and procedures of their predecessors.

Colonel Badger also saw the need for such material. During 1982, he prepared his "Notes for New District Commanders," which was published by St. Paul District. North Central Division's commander, Brigadier General Scott B. Smith, approved the pamphlet and recommended it to new district engineers, observing that Badger's "Notes" could be "very helpful in getting a fix on the complexities of your new job as well as provide you with some insights on how to do it."

This set of interviews represents the beginning of a program in which we hope to achieve the same goal through recording the views of a number of district engineers. We will choose districts of different kinds, for example, some with major ports, and others with responsibilities for navigation on major rivers or for part of the Great Lakes system. By so doing, we hope to document the problems and possibilities faced by district engineers in a variety of locations as well as their common concerns.

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